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THE MESSAGE OF JESUS TO OUR MODERN LIFE

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STUDY I—*Concluded*

III. THE EXPERIENCE OF JESUS AS A BASIS OF HIS TEACHING

Jesus was not a speculator about abstract truth. His teachings are his experience expressed in words. In this sense they are, as he said, "spirit and life." We cannot understand his teaching until we understand him. It is a gospel not only from Jesus, but about Jesus. The fact that he experienced God makes him such a trustworthy revelation of God, and it is through his teachings that we can understand his inner experiences.

Tenth day.—§ 9. *Jesus knew God as father:* Luke 2:40-51; John, chap. 17. Study Luke 2:40-51, and notice how the reply of the boy Jesus must indicate an inner experience which even Mary did not understand. This deep unity of Jesus with God in his own experience is clearly taught in the prayer in John, chap. 17. Read also John 10:7-18, 22-39.

Eleventh day.—§ 10. *Jesus prayed to God as father:* In all the great crises of his life Jesus is said to have sought strength and help from his father. Thus at his baptism, Luke 3:21-22; at his transfiguration, Luke 9:28-36; in the garden, Luke 22:39-46; on the cross, Luke 23:44-46 (find other instances).

Twelfth day.—Matt. 11:21-27. Because of his knowledge of God as father Jesus was enabled to bear disappointment. (Notice particularly vs. 25.)

Thirteenth day.—§ 11. *Jesus' faith in God:* Luke 9:57-62; Matt. 16:21-26. This faith in God can be seen throughout Jesus' ministry. Note Luke 9:57-62. It is this sublime faith in the will of God that took him to the cross. Read Matt. 16:21-26. *He knew the cross as a part of God's will:* It is this faith in God which made him willing to meet death at the hands of his enemies.

Fourteenth and fifteenth days.—§ 12. *Jesus considered himself as embodying the character of God:* Matt. 11:27-30; John 5:38-47; 12:35-36; 14:1-11. In fact,

throughout his life Jesus continually represents himself as showing forth in his own life the character of God which he described in his teaching.

IV. JESUS' TEACHING OF THE FATHERLINESS OF GOD

There are two main questions to be answered by all those who study Jesus' teaching as to God as father. First, Did Jesus think of God philosophically or religiously? Secondly, How did he expect men to come to the knowledge of God as father? The answer given by Jesus to these two questions is very simple. Jesus did not speak of God as a philosopher speaks when he speaks of the fatherhood of God, but very simply, out from his experience of sonship. In other words, it is rather God's *fatherliness* than his *fatherhood* of which he speaks.

The answer to the second question is also simple. Man gets to know God as father when he undertakes to follow Jesus' teaching as to God and live a life of love.

Sixteenth day.—§ 13. *God's fatherliness may be seen in Nature:* Matt. 6:25-30; 10:28-31. Read carefully Matt. 6:25-30. If Jesus had thought of God the Father as less than the God of Nature, he would have had two Gods. The real heart of Jesus' teaching is that the God of Nature can be seen as the God of love. Read also Matt. 10:28-31 carefully.

Seventeenth day.—§ 14. *The supremacy of the will of God, that of a father, not of a king:* Mark 13:19; 7:8-10; 10:1-9; Matt. 7:21; 15-20. Note that while Jesus never spoke of God as king, or as the God of a national covenant, or as a national father, or as a giver of a statutory law, he yet regards what may be called *the primal relations of life as established by God*. Mark 13:19; 7:8-10; 10:1-9. Further, he regards the will of God when once it is revealed as the supreme authority of life. Matt. 7:21. Note, however, that the context of this saying, Matt. 7:15-20, makes it clear that he is speaking, not about a new law, but about a new life of the one who would be like God.

Eighteenth day.—§ 15. *The fatherliness of God may be argued from human fatherliness:* Matt. 7:9-11 (Luke 11:11-13); Luke 15:1-32; 18:2-7. Jesus' knowledge of man and the observance of *human kindliness is made by him a means of discovering the character of God*. Thus in the extreme cases of the unjust judge, Luke 18:2-7, and the selfish neighbor, Luke 11:5-10, he teaches how prayers are sure to be answered. In his argument for the fatherly love of God from Matt. 7:9-11 (Luke 11:11-13); Luke 15:1-32, we have the central analogy of the teaching of Jesus.

Nineteenth day.—§ 16. *Paul's philosophical teaching regarding God as Father:* Acts, chap. 17. Jesus gives no such philosophical conception of God's relation with men as that of Paul in Acts, chap. 17. Students should read this chapter and if possible state distinctly the view which Paul has in mind.

Twentieth day.—§ 17. *Further teaching of the fatherliness of God:* Matt. 5:45-48; 6:1, 4, 6, 9, 18, 32; 10:29; 11:25-27; 18:14; 23:9; Luke 12:32; 6:36. The passages which are usually quoted to show Jesus' conception of God as father of all men, regardless of their attitude toward him are: Matt. 5:45-48; 6:1, 4, 6, 9, 18, 31, 32; 10:29; 11:25-27; 18:14; 23:9; Luke 12:32, 6:36. It would be well to study these passages carefully and decide whether Jesus did teach anything more than that God's attitude is one of love toward all people.

Twenty-first day.—Matt. 11:27; 7:11; cf. 12:50; John 8:31-59. However one may answer the preceding question, is it not clear from Matt. 11:27; 7:11; cf. 12:50, that Jesus regards the parental analogy as especially fitting to express God's moral attitude toward those who do his will? To appreciate how the relation of father and son is used by Jesus to express character, see John 8:31-59.

Twenty-second day.—§ 18. Matt. 5:45; Luke, chap. 15; Rom. 5:1-11; John 3:16. In this connection we should note the teaching of Jesus concerning God's attitude toward evil men (Matt. 5:45). Recall the parables in Luke, chap. 15. It is this conception of God that finds so large a place in the teaching of the New Testament, for instance, Rom. 5:1-11; John 3:16.

Twenty-third day.—§ 19. *God's fatherliness does not make him indifferent to sin:* Matt. 12:31-37; John 5:30-47. As a corrective of possible false impressions which this insistence upon God's love might make, it is necessary to recall that from his conception of God as the supporter of the universe, Jesus could not fail to recognize God as *hostile to all that makes against his character of love*. See Matt. 12:31-37; John 5:30-47.

V. THE ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S FATHERLINESS

Jesus never reaches a religious conception without a moral application. His morality springs from his religion directly. To understand fully his teaching about God as Father it is necessary, therefore, to remember that the family analogy would argue that those who regard God as Father must themselves be brothers.

Twenty-fourth day.—§ 20. *Faith in God means service to one's fellows:* Matt. 6:19-34. The *bearing upon conduct* of this faith in God as loving may be seen in such sayings as Matt. 6:19-34.

Twenty-fifth day.—§ 21. *Faith in God means love of one's fellows:* Matt. 5:44-48; 6:14, 15. We have now reached the fundamental ethical conception of Jesus, namely, that *since God is love those who would be like him must be loving* (Matt. 5:44-48; 6:14, 15).

Twenty-sixth day.—*The meaning of this teaching for the modern man:* How do you think of God? Men and women of today are prone to think of God in terms of impersonal law. Living as we do in a scientific atmosphere, we are constantly tempted to think that we are subject to impersonal, rather than personal, forces. Is not this somewhat similar to the Pharisaic conception of the supremacy of laws which came from God? Must we not, in our conception, think of God as personal; that is, infinite in wisdom, love, and purpose? Review the teaching of Jesus in Divisions I and II.

Twenty-seventh day.—Those who are not accustomed to think scientifically, on the other hand, sometimes think of God so anthropomorphically as to make him only a great man up in the sky. Is not Jesus' teaching as to God's control of Nature a corrective of this imperfect view? Review in this connection the related paragraphs in Division IV.

Twenty-eighth day.—There is a strong tendency among many people to think of God as indifferent to the obligations of his moral nature and hesitating to punish those who violate the principles of spiritual life. Do you think this is in accordance with the teaching of Jesus as we find it set forth in the work of this month? Search for evidence on this point.

Twenty-ninth day.—When we think of the fatherliness of God, have we not the greatest basis for faith in God in daily life? Do we not need true theological conceptions of God to give us courage and hope in the midst of life's temptations? Can there be any other interpretation of Jesus' conception than this? Again review.

Thirtieth day.—Does it not follow, if a God of law is also a God of love, that he must also be the God of social evolution? Will he not be as much interested in our industrial affairs as he was in the political affairs of the Hebrews? Can we hope to be like him without ourselves expressing this divine interest in human affairs?